

## **Project Purpose**

The Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), with approximately 38,000 units of public housing and 28,000 vouchered housing choice units<sup>1</sup> has been one of the nation's most distressed housing authorities. Years of insufficient planning, arbitrary policies and poorly administered resources left the CHA in turmoil and reduced it to a mere warehouse of low-income people in Chicago. The ensuing age and distressed physical conditions of buildings rendered them virtually uninhabitable and beyond repair. Attempts to provide the most basic services were insufficient. More and more public housing residents were forced to reside in deteriorating buildings, isolated from the rest of the city. Housing management was inadequate or indifferent to their plight. Ultimately the situation became so dire that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) took control of the agency, reduced its level of deficiency to a minimum standard of viability and finally returned control of CHA to the City of Chicago. HUD mandated future improvement of the agency's performance, Chicago seizing the opportunity more than complied.

On January 6, 2000, CHA submitted a five-year strategic plan outlining major program changes, policy directions, and organizational initiatives to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Plan for Transformation took a hard and honest look at what would be required of Chicago to transform public housing. It asked waivers to federal policies and operating procedures that could impede the plan's success. One month later, the federal government approved CHA's plan, making it effective for the next ten years<sup>2</sup>. CHA's transformation is crucially important. It represents a once in a lifetime opportunity to significantly impact Chicago's future, simultaneously creating a national model for the development of quality, affordable housing for low-income families. The proposed changes affect the way the housing authority assures better housing and quality human/public services delivery to meet the needs of approximately 133,000 tenants.

Chicago's public housing and vouchered Housing Choice residents currently represent 4.7% of the 88% African-American, 8.5% White, 5.3% Hispanic<sup>3</sup>, 0.8% Asian, 0.1% Native American and 2.6% other.<sup>4</sup>

Over the next several years, the Chicago Housing Authority's (CHA) developments will undergo a landmark transformation. Although all of the properties are now privately managed, many of CHA's larger complexes will be completely redeveloped. The complexes will transition from communities composed entirely of very low-income residents, to indistinguishable mixed income communities with both subsidized and unsubsidized tenants. Other complexes will experience extensive renovations. CHA forecasts indicate most of the families will need to move temporarily, making the difficult decision to relocate from familiar public housing developments into unfamiliar Chicago neighborhoods or suburban communities. Most CHA residents will experience at least two housing moves during the next five years, as they relocate from their current housing into either Housing Choice apartments or other vacant units located within CHA, finally returning to their original developments or electing to stay in their new found communities. Funding is currently available for 2,000 families to receive mobility counseling, which consists of an initial briefing and dialogues on the Housing Choice Voucher Program, its eligibility criteria, guidelines and fair housing opportunities information, and the identification of providers of privately managed available rental units. This unprecedented movement of CHA residents, combined with changes in the administration of social service delivery for the developments, creates new pressures on Chicago's

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<sup>1</sup> The Housing Choice Voucher Program formerly was known as Section 8. To date there are 23,650 households that have qualified for the Housing Choice program, 85% of these households are female-headed households and 39% are headed by a person with a disability

<sup>2</sup> For specific information concerning CHA's Plan for Transformation see [http://www.thecha.org/2001\\_final\\_plan\\_English.pdf](http://www.thecha.org/2001_final_plan_English.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Hispanic is categorized as an ethnic code and may include several ethnicities.

<sup>4</sup> Demographics are provided by the Chicago Housing Authority Office of Management and Planning, 2001

human and public service delivery systems. CHA's transformation process has redirected funding for many human services directly provided by the housing authority in the past, to the responsible and appropriate City agencies. Consequently, there has been a major redefinition of responsibilities for many of these agencies, i.e. the Chicago Department of Human Services (CDHS), Department on Aging (DOA) and the Mayors' Office of Work Force Development. This re-incorporation means increasing public housing residents' methods of public access and systems navigation.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, relocating families' school-aged children will require frequent record transfers from their different primary and secondary schools prior to their enrollment. Forecasts of school enrollment and attendance are required to address potential overcrowding, determine special needs and make an adequate allocation of resources. Therefore, it is essential to know the number, grades and accurate ages of the relocating school aged children.<sup>6</sup> Because of the anticipated volume of relocatees, advance knowledge of the number of affordable units, their location, accessibility and leasing requirements is essential. However, the current technological systems are self-contained and discrete, necessitating systems' integration across various city agencies, and community organizations.

The evolving system faces numerous challenges in order to meet new and more rigorous standards for lease compliance and eligibility. While CHA, CPS and CDHS are embarking on an ambitious plan to provide stronger information, referral and case management services<sup>7</sup> to residents, it is already clear that resources will be taxed and that client-staff ratios will be higher than ideal. The Chicago metropolitan area is a diffuse, complex, diverse and highly competitive housing market; the success of the transformation effort depends upon CHA's residents' preparedness and the ability of service providers navigating the system effectively. To meet these challenges, the CHA, CHAC, Inc. the administrator of the Chicago Housing Voucher Choice Program, Chicago Public Schools, the Metro Chicago Information Center (MCIC), Roosevelt University, Northeastern Illinois University, the Mac Arthur Foundation and Chicago's public housing residents propose to construct a web-based information and referral system, TheRight MovesNet. The project's primary goal is to increase public housing residents' technological access so that a seamless and secure exchange of information is made across organizational boundaries that assists them in making informed housing choices and plans, resulting in their successful relocations or returns. The table below indicates some of the measurable immediate and intermediate outcomes that would logically result from the goal's achievement.

**Table 1 Housing Relocation Outcomes**

<b>Immediate Outcomes</b>	<b>Intermediate Outcomes</b>
Increased access of technology to underserved community	Increased levels of public housing residents' self sufficiency
Increased technological capacity of end users	Increased interagency coordination around housing related issues
Improved data share and exchange protocols	Increased systems integration
Increased awareness of available community resources and services	Increased participant utilization of existing supportive services
Increased access to reliable housing information by public housing residents	Increased satisfaction with housing choices for both tenants and landlords
Reduced staff/client ratios due to client ability to self-help	Better reallocation of educational resources
Reduced transaction time for educational transfers	Decreased academic interruption
Reduced housing relocation time	Increased home/school attachment
	Increased systems efficiency and economies of scale

<sup>5</sup> A specialized case management structure (Service Connector System) has been designed to help transition and increase CHA developments' access to a more extensive and stronger network of social supports.

<sup>6</sup> The Chicago Public Schools is currently redesigning the student information system with ARC VIEW software to assist with necessary information compilations to assess and project student overcrowding.

<sup>7</sup> At the time of the proposal's submission, intergovernmental agreements were in the process of execution and not available for disclosure.

The Chicago Housing Authority will oversee development of the system. The completed system will consist of a number of directories/modules made available to the user through an entry map screen that allows the user to target the part of the city in which they are interested. Various modules would also contain links to agencies and institutions pertinent to that module and, where possible, access would be designed for data exchange. The system's design will afford community residents, in ten public housing developments located within Chicago's designated Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Communities, access to the maximum amount of information with minimal or, in many cases, no staff supervision. A full description of the systems' data modules is detailed in the Appendix section.

### **Innovation**

TheRightMovesNet builds on the innovations and adaptations of previously funded TOP recipients. In considering its development the partnering organizations explored the various applications of the Community Services Network Project in Philadelphia, Project Impact in Lake County Illinois, Governor State University's LincolnNet, the Intertribal GIS Council in Montana, United Way's Community Alliance Web and Seattle's recently funded Housing Clearing House. Over the past three years, CHA staff has conversed with various TOP project administrators. Their cautions, advice, support and lessons learned from them contributed towards the development of this TOP application.

TheRightMovesNet applies technology to create an inter-related, multi-media, web-based system comprised of GIS data structure, self-assessment modules, service directories and be capable of telecommunication transfer operations. The Right MovesNet will be distributed over a wide area network to increase access to information, facilitate decision-making and increase coordination and efficiency of effort for underserved communities. The system increases public access to public housing residents, the housing specialists and human service providers that will immediately assist them through the relocation process, property management personnel and potential landlords. The initial tier of access and data exchange will occur among public housing residents located in Chicago's Empowerment Zone, the CHA, Chicago Department of Human Services, Chicago Public Schools and the privately managed CHA Housing Voucher Choice Program, CHAC, Inc. The second level of public access, information dissemination, will be available through local community agencies with Internet access, i.e. Chicago's Boys and Girls Clubs, pre-existing social service networks, the Metro Chicago Information Center, Northeastern Illinois University's Center for Inner City Studies. The John T. and Catherine MacArthur Foundation has added its support to many of Chicago's current public housing initiatives and has helped to provide technical assistance

The web-based resident bulletin board will also create an innovative approach to individual problem solving. Studies have demonstrated that paraprofessional counseling can produce outcomes equal to those of professionals. For many people, merely engaging others in the solving of their problems is a helpful step toward reaching critical decisions. For many issues, despite low levels of formal education or employment, people have extensive and useful wisdom and life experiences to contribute to solving the problems of others, particularly to the extent that cultural continuity is essential to effective communication. This web-based approach offers the possibility of creating a tool that can facilitate these valuable interactions.

### **Diffusion Potential**

The project has strong potential for replication in other settings. Across the nation, many housing authorities are undergoing similar transformations and transitions due to redevelopment activities. They will be impacted by the same problems and concerns that Chicago is currently experiencing. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has expressed an interest

in the project's development. Provision can be made to share designs with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, as well as, with other housing authorities, community based agencies and Local Education Agencies, who may be similarly impacted. The utilization of a public/private partnership strategy, focused on the system integration and coordination of housing based needs of this magnitude is an unprecedented innovation for the City of Chicago. While the modules proposed here are designed to incorporate data that is readily available in the Chicago metropolitan community, most, if not all, of that data is accessible in some form in other places. Should the proposed combined technological approaches of data sharing and data exchange to facilitate systems integration accessible to underserved persons with minimal to no access of service staff is successful, this will be of great interest to human service providers and local governmental entities nation-wide. It could serve as a model for cities undergoing major neighborhood revitalization throughout the country. In economic terms, the system when fully implemented could reduce the transaction cost of providing social services, help to accelerate public housing transformations, a reduce family and community disruptions.

An important element for diffusion will be facilitating the use of web-based technologies to give underserved communities independent access to information necessary to make life-changing decisions. Because the system is web-based, the entire network would be available to any public housing resident with access to the Internet regardless of where their computer was located. Minimally, residents could utilize computers that will be located in each public housing development, the offices of social service staff of each development, local schools, community technology centers, nearby churches or in public libraries located near developments.

### **Project Feasibility**

The Right MovesNet will support data exchange, system integration and facilitate the relocation process. End users will include public housing residents, school personnel, participating human service providers, relocation counseling agencies, and property management firms contracted for housing choice or affordable housing. Its usage will enable the various service delivery staff, and public housing residents themselves, to access related housing information, identify potential barriers or constraints to a successful relocation, locate resources in their selected communities which address their various needs, share and exchange data and maintain confidential communications.

Information will be shared through the use of a common database standard, Oracle 8i. Oracle databases are the current standard of the City of Chicago and the Chicago Public Schools. Information tables are linked through the use of "key indicator fields". For example, service referrals can be linked via recipient client identification number to the school the resident attends or to the development site where they live. In this way, individual tables can be expanded to meet future requirements with little disturbance to the remainder of the system. This technology allows for the elimination of data entry redundancy and the need for validation of data across multiple systems. Deployment of this technology via the web will enable system support to be centralized and will minimize the hardware/processing requirements to the end users. End users will only need access to the web in order to enter and retrieve information.

Users possessing a login identification and password will be allowed to enter information via the intranet, a secured site on the web. Information will also be secured through the use of the login identification and password, allowing only authorized users access to specified information. The database will be backed up on a nightly basis and will be subject to the CHA Disaster Recovery Plan.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The CHA is currently developing the scope of work that will be part of a Request for Proposal to select a vendor to work with the CHA to develop the Disaster Recovery Plan which would safeguard data in the event that the technology becomes inaccessible or inoperable

The project will have three major phases. The first year of the project will involve several simultaneous processes, specifically design, content development and system maintenance. This will include the design of software, platform, and programming, acquisition of content and the design of processes for updating content. Incorporated in this phase is: 1) technical and functional requirements definition, 2) software/hardware selection and procurement, 3) hardware configuration, 4) software implementation/configuration or modification if necessary, 5) unit testing, and 6) integration testing. A second phase encompasses end user readiness defined as communication planning, communication deployment, training and acceptance testing. This is followed by the system transition phase, i.e. help desk formation, hardware and software support readiness, and business continuity is planned. Upon completion of these phases, deployment will occur. It is planned that during the first six months of the second year, the system will be piloted utilizing CHA-CDHS staff at one or two of the CHA development sites. The system will be available over the web to anyone seeking to use it unassisted. The system will be fully implemented across the CHA beginning in the seventh month of Year 2 with training of all CHA-CDHS service provider staff in its use, and with these staff utilizing it in client counseling by the ninth month.

The project is being designed for interface with and incorporation into the City of Chicago's infrastructure, CivicNet and at some point will be linked for secure data exchange with the Chicago Department of Human Services' data management system. Statistics show that only 11 percent of lower-income Chicago residents have access to the Internet at home. These residents and their children depend on access at school, at the public libraries and at local organizations. CivicNet will bring the benefits to Chicago's community organizations, consequently, as part of the infrastructure there will be a fundamental level of sustainability. Additionally, the Chicago Housing Authority will have access to free ISP service to underserved communities through the Illinois Century Network<sup>9</sup> for the ten on-site public housing development locations. HUD and the U.S. Department of Education both provide technical assistance to schools, community programs and housing organizations under various grant programs. CHA's nonprofit subsidiary, the Charles A. Hayes Family Investment Center, is a funded USDE Community Technology Center, and will be a focal point for on going systems training. Finally, there is escalating interest related to public housing initiatives in Chicago's philanthropic community, three areas receiving considerable attention are service delivery, capacity building and the use of technology.

### **Community Involvement**

CHA's transformation plan and its projected phases of redevelopment rehabilitation and relocation have encompassed a comprehensive, multi-year planning process. Public housing residents, CHA and the various City of Chicago Departments, private development and property managers, consultants, and community based organizations that provided supportive or capacity building services to the targeted community areas, engaged in numerous planning charrettes and public forums. Key components of these discussions were: where would residents find temporary housing, how much housing could be made readily available, what services would be necessary to successfully transition between communities, what communication systems 'could expediently and securely facilitate informational exchanges, how the system could be designed for maximum utility by the end users. From this process, staff from the CHA identified and approached a number of key community stakeholders to discuss collaborating around the concept and implementation of TheRight MovesNet. Discussions were held with the following organizations:

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<sup>9</sup> Illinois Century Network, established by the Illinois Century Network Act of 1999, is a high speed telecommunications network that provides reliable communication links to and among Illinois' schools, institutions of higher education, libraries, museums, research institutions, state agencies, units of local government, and other local entities that provide services to Illinois citizens.

The Metropolitan Chicago Information Center is an independent, non-profit research organization committed to increasing the quality, quantity, and accessibility of information about human conditions and the quality of life in the Chicago Metropolitan area. Begun in 1989 with the leadership of the United Way/Crusade of Mercy, the Chicago Community Trust, MacArthur Foundation and the McCormick Tribune Foundation, MCIC arose from the belief that an independent non-profit research agency could improve the planning and resource allocation decisions made by organizations in the non-profit, public, and corporate sectors. MCIC is one of Chicago's foremost authorities on Geographical Information Systems.

CHAC, Inc. is the contract administrator of the Chicago Housing Choice Voucher Program, Moderate Rehabilitation, and the Project-Based Certificate Programs in Chicago. The Chicago Housing Choice Voucher Program, provides federal rental assistance, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), assisting low income families with the rental of apartment units, condominiums or single family homes in the private market. The program is especially beneficial because it takes advantage of a community's existing housing supply (which may be unaffordable without a subsidy) and it serves to integrate low income families into neighborhoods. It allows participants to choose where they would like to live and which community best fits overall family needs and goals. CHAC currently has 28,088 units under lease and has placed over 2,000 relocation families in the private market as of February 2001. CHAC's Rent Reasonableness helps relocating families make an affordable housing choice based on the nine comprehensive factors (location, quality, size, unit type, age of the contract unit, amenities, housing services, maintenance and utilities to be provided by the owner in accordance with the lease)

Northeastern Illinois University Center for Inner City Studies is located in the midst of the Chicago Empowerment Zone. Committed to utilizing the resources of the University to develop and implement strategies that address pressing community needs. CICS is engaged numerous initiatives that bring value to this collaboration, i.e. the training and counseling of relocating families through the CHA's Good Neighbor Counseling Program, technical assistance and capacity building with Chicago's EZ/EC grantees and applicants, basic skills and technology literacy training for 1300 Chicago Public School parents, many of whom reside in redeveloping CHA communities. CICS has a strong technology arm, a history of culturally sensitive and successful training programs and two computer labs in the targeted area. CICS technology site design the graphics and creative aspects of website as well as the linkages Site maintenance entering and updating the content. Content management - selection, editing and presentation of the site contents Quality assurance - Field-testing and fine tuning the site for accuracy and user friendliness

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is the nation's third-largest school district and the second-largest employer in Illinois, with more than 43,000 employees. The school system operates 559 schools and serves 430,000 students. 79% of students come from low-income families, 14.9% are limited English proficient, and 11.4% have special needs. CPS is the administrator of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program and has multiple school locations either within or adjacent to the targeted public housing communities. Through this program provides the framework for students, parents and community residents to benefit from the educational and employment training opportunities afforded them. They are the beneficiaries

of an on going update of electronic technological and telecommunication programs via workshop and seminar sessions.

An independent evaluation team from Roosevelt University, representatives from the John T. and Catherine MacArthur Foundation, and the technical assistance provider to Ujima, a resident directed community based organization targeting peer assisted services in one of CHA's targeted public housing developments were also involved in the discussions.

Finally, from a community involvement perspective, direct engagement of public housing residents in problem solving through web-based applications is a way of bridging the Digital Divide, thus reducing informational apartheid. Beyond financial constraints causing lack of access to personal computers, Internet usage may not have become attractive to certain end users because it remains a vague abstraction, as opposed to a tool for solving immediate problems, creating virtual communities or establishing valued social connections. Some end users may lack digital literacy, or suffer problems with functional illiteracy and/or developmental barriers. They will still need a staff person or relocation specialist to assist them with personal planning and use of the system proposed here. However, it is also possible that the use of the Internet, and its inherent anonymity, will lead to greater willingness on the part of end users to seek service assistance avoiding the stigma that can attach to making social service needs known to another person. It is our goal that many relocating end users will be enabled to make more complex life decisions independent of professional help. By creatively engaging CHA residents in problem solving through a culturally appropriate, multi-media, web-based technology, the project will have the ancillary benefit of training people to help others, as well as themselves.

The project will involve CHA residents directly in its planning and implementation at numerous stages. Representatives from CHA Central Advisory Council will be asked to be part of a Project Review Committee that will convene semi annually to review progress on project development, suggest improvements and review statistics on utilization. During the content development stage, focus groups will be convened to review each module and commend user-friendly language, graphics, sequence, and access. Using a "Training of Trainers" model and a participatory training approach<sup>10</sup>, residents will be trained to assist peers and others using the model, thus expanding the community's capacity for knowledge generation, understanding, participation and acceptance. This kind of participatory training approach is a method of experiential education that takes place in several ways. People are encouraged to work with the knowledge they have from their own experience; they can develop strategies together to change their immediate situation.

### **Evaluation**

The evaluation will serve two purposes. First, it will help program staff understand which areas or components of the service are most and least effective. This "formative" evaluation will allow the CHA and the participating agencies to adjust and improve the system to best serve the users as it is implemented. Second, it will examine to what extent access to and/or utilization of this type of web-based service improves relocation and service outcomes for users. The evaluation will combine both process and outcome assessment. All instruments will be field tested for cultural competency, validity and reliability. Evaluation questions will include the following:

Questions regarding the service outcomes, e.g.:

- Do individuals who have access to the system have an increased awareness of community resources and services available to them?

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<sup>10</sup> A detailed justification for the use of the Participatory Training Approach is included in the Appendix section.

- How is the increased student mobility in relocation areas affecting student performance? Has transaction time decreased? Are student/teacher ratios increasing or decreasing in relocation areas? How are per pupil expenditure dollars being affected in relocation areas?
- Is interagency communication and coordination improving as a result of the project? Are there needed services that relocating families cannot access?
- Are families using the system experiencing better outcomes in areas such as employment, home/school attachment or family stability?

Questions regarding the relocation outcomes, e.g.:

- Are they more likely to move outside of their immediate neighborhood or to relocate to private housing using Housing Choice Vouchers?
- Are system users any more likely to maintain eligibility for subsidized housing?
- Are tenants more satisfied with their relocation experience?
- Are participating landlords more satisfied with their relocation experience?
- Do tenants using the system experience less housing mobility than others i.e., that is, are they more likely to remain in their new neighborhood for a longer time.

Questions regarding technological capacity, e.g.

- Is there an increase in digital literacy by project participants in the targeted underserved areas?
- Has there been a seamless exchange of data between the participating service entities?

### Data Collection

Information for the evaluation will come from four primary sources. User logs from the system itself that indicate, among other things, site access frequency, preference and repetition; and 2) satisfaction surveys and key informant interviews with end users, CHA residents, human service and housing providers, at various points in the relocation process regarding their evaluation of the system's utility. A third source will be administrative data from CHA and CPS on various relocation outcomes, including placement rates at different sites over time, destination of relocation and subsequent mobility rates among CHA residents; the degree and results of social service utilization, student mobility rates and pupil/teacher ratios for the targeted areas and vacancy rates for temporarily assigned relocation units. Data will be collected each trimester of the project's implementation period.

### Data Analysis

Evaluators will determine which parts of the web-based system receive the most use, compare the outcomes and satisfaction of users and non-users of the system, compare relocation and service outcomes across sites for periods before and after implementation of the system. The evaluation will produce periodic reports aimed at creating ongoing system improvements, and a final report that evaluates the overall effectiveness of the project. The final report will be made available to the participating collaboration members, key community stakeholders and other interested parties, upon request.

A team of evaluators will be responsible for implementing the evaluation design. Jim Lewis, Assistant Professor of Public Affairs, Roosevelt University, Brian Jacob, Assistant Professor, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Jens Ludwig, Associate Professor, School of Public Policy, Georgetown University. (Please see Appendix section for the evaluators' biographies and qualifications).